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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [HK](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: HONG KONG'S GREEN PAPER: NO SIGN OF PROGRESS

REF: A. HONG KONG 0603
[1](#)B. HONG KONG 01833
[1](#)C. HONG KONG 02170
[1](#)D. HONG KONG 02067
[1](#)E. HONG KONG 2202

Classified By: Acting E/P Chief Craig Reilly; Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Hong Kong's "Green Paper" process to develop a broad consensus on how to implement universal suffrage has stalled. The key players, including the Hong Kong Government (HKG), the pro-Beijing and pro-HKG political parties, the pro-democratization parties, and the central government in Beijing, all seem unwilling to engage in meaningful consultation or to compromise. The HKG has begun staging public forums to discuss the issues, which the pan-democrats ridicule as a public relations show. The generally pro-HKG and pro-Beijing DAB has been absorbed with funeral arrangements for its deceased chairman and selection of his successor. The pro-business Liberal Party (LP) has backed away from its previous support for universal suffrage for the 2012 Chief Executive (CE) election in favor of "not later than 2017 if conditions are ripe." The leader of the pro-Beijing Federation of Trade Unions (FTU) recently remarked that universal suffrage in 2012 would be "impossible," after which Democratic Party (DP) Chairman Albert Ho told him to "keep his mouth shut." The pan-democrats continue to criticize their opponents vociferously while standing fast for universal suffrage for both the 2012 CE and Legislative Council (Legco) elections. The central government openly entered the fray when a senior Hong Kong-based PRC official observed that a majority of Hong Kong people found 2017 an "acceptable" date for universal suffrage. A recent public opinion poll suggests majority support for universal suffrage in 2012 for both elections. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: Rather than progress toward a Green Paper consensus, mutual animosity and rancor seem to be escalating. The pan-democrats fear that the central government and its local allies, by urging the public to accept 2017, will succeed in lowering expectations and rendering the people resigned to their fate. The HKG seems amenable to that approach, or simply resigned to the fact that Beijing has the final say. At this point a compromise solution is not in sight. Veteran political commentator Frank Ching told us that unless CE Donald Tsang had a "hidden plan" and could "pull a rabbit out of his hat," Ching did not see how the Green Paper process could succeed. He also pointed out that Beijing continues to insist that the Basic Law gives it substantive authority to formally appoint the CE; even with full universal suffrage, that power would enable the central government to reject the winner of a CE election. End Comment.

13. (SBU) During his re-election campaign early this year, Hong Kong CE Donald Tsang publicly and repeatedly vowed to "resolve" the universal suffrage issue within his term of office -- i.e., by 2012 (ref a). With the July 11 release of the "Green Paper" listing various options for reform, the HKG said it hoped to stimulate a public debate leading to consensus on the way forward (ref b). CE Tsang previously had specified that a consensus proposal would require approval by the HKG, likely approval by two-thirds of Legco members, support from at least sixty percent of the Hong Kong public, and "standing a good chance" of gaining acceptance from the central government in Beijing. Since then, however, the various players in the process -- the HKG, the pro-Beijing and pro-HKG political parties, the pro-democratization parties, and the central government in Beijing -- do not appear to have engaged in any meaningful consultation, nor do they appear willing to compromise.

Hong Kong Government

14. (SBU) On August 21 the HKG, represented by Chief Secretary Henry Tang, Secretary for Mainland and Constitutional Affairs Stephen Lam, and Secretary for Home Affairs Tsang Tak-sing, convened the first of four public forums on the Green Paper. Tang emphasized the need for consensus and urged attendees to strive for a balance between economic and political development and to avoid the use of civil disobedience to pressure the government. Several pro-democracy participants criticized the HKG's "monopolization" of the forum, which they characterized as a public relations show.

15. (SBU) On August 27, Secretary Lam told a district council

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meeting that "some sectors in the community" believed that universal suffrage in 2012 might be inconsistent with the Basic Law's requirement of "gradual and orderly progress." Furthermore, two other issues -- formation of a CE nomination committee and reform of the Legco functional constituencies -- were similarly controversial. In response, pro-democracy Confederation of Trade Unions legislator Lee Cheuk-yan said Lam had "opened up this box" to attract intervention from the central government.

Pro-Government Parties

16. (SBU) Hong Kong's largest political party, the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB), almost always supports the central government and generally supports the HKG on major policy issues. Since the August 8 death of party chairman Ma Lik (refs d and e), however, the DAB leadership has been absorbed with funeral preparations followed by the election of a new chairman, Tam Yiu-chung, on August 28. Now that their internal issues are more settled, the DAB likely will play a greater role in the public debate on constitutional reform.

17. (SBU) The Liberal Party (LP), which reflects the interests of Hong Kong's leading tycoons and also supports the HKG on many issues, has backed away from its previous support for universal suffrage in the 2012 CE election. In a position paper submitted to CE Tsang during a consultation on the CE's annual October policy address, the LP says it now favors returning the CE by universal suffrage "not later than 2017 if conditions are ripe." For Legco, the LP paper said reform should be phased in sometime after the CE election is democratized. LP Vice Chair Selina Chow claimed "not later than 2017" was clearer than its previous conditional support for 2012. While the Democratic Party immediately criticized the LP's "U-turn," political scientist Ma Ngoc noted that the party had little choice but to "follow Beijing's line."

18. (SBU) The Federation of Trade Unions (FTU), Hong Kong's

largest labor confederation, is strongly pro-Beijing and usually pro-HKG. Its President, Cheng Yiu-tong, is a member of both the Executive Council and Legco, and the FTU has two other Legco members as well. On August 25, Cheng remarked that it would be "impossible" to attain universal suffrage in 2012 because to do so would conflict with the Basic Law's requirement for "gradual and orderly progress." After pan-democratic leaders including Democratic Party Chairman Albert Ho objected strongly, telling Cheng to "keep his mouth shut," he subsequently clarified his statement by saying he was merely expressing his personal views.

Pro-Democracy Parties

¶9. (SBU) Members of the various pan-democratic parties also have been somewhat pre-occupied with selection of a joint candidate to contest the December 2 by-election for Ma Lik's Legco seat. Several democrats continue to promote their proposal to implement a form of universal suffrage for both the CE and Legco in 2012. They would expand the CE nomination committee and modify the functional constituency election process to make it more democratic. At the same time, the democrats have responded vigorously and critically to comments by HKG leaders, the LP, the FTU, and the central government (see paras 4, 5, 7, 8, 10).

Beijing

¶10. (SBU) The central government, represented by the Central Government Liaison Office (CGLO) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Office, tends to keep a very low public profile in Hong Kong. For the most part, they have avoided much comment on the Green Paper, leading some observers to believe their tactic was simple procrastination. On August 22, however, a senior mainland official, CGLO Deputy Director Li Guikang, observed that more than half of the Hong Kong people found it "acceptable" if universal suffrage for the CE and Legco could not be achieved in 2012. This, he said, demonstrated the increasingly "rational" views of the Hong Kong people. The pan-democrats immediately complained that Li's comments revealed that the Green Paper process was a "fake" because Beijing already had ruled out the possibility of universal suffrage in 2012. Several days later, veteran politician Allen Lee -- who has close ties with Beijing -- called on the pan-democrats to accept 2017 and then focus on ensuring that target is met.

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Hong Kong Public Opinion

¶11. (SBU) Recent public opinion polls on the Green Paper and universal suffrage have indicated large fluctuations in public support for the various options, probably due to the less-than-clear nature of the Green Paper itself and to differences in phrasing by the pollsters. Hong Kong's most authoritative pollster, Hong Kong University Professor Robert Chung, recently issued findings that appear to show strong support for universal suffrage in 2012. In a survey conducted August 20-24, Chung found that 55 percent of respondents favored universal suffrage for the CE and 50 percent for Legco in 2012. However, he also found that an additional 10-15 percent of the respondents favored universal suffrage sometime before 2012. Combining the two groups, Chung produced support rates for universal suffrage not later than 2012 of 69 percent for the CE and 60 percent for Legco.

Cunningham